



Draft NEP: How does it affect teachers?

THE DRAFT NATIONAL EDUCATION POLICY (NEP) PROPOSES REFORMS AT ALL LEVELS TO ADDRESS THE CHALLENGES OF THE INDIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM. **DR VIMALA RAMACHANDRAN** EXPLAINS WHAT THE POLICY MEANS FOR TEACHERS.

Policies related to teachers – their preparation, deployment, academic support, professional growth, career advancement, and teacher appraisal – remain highly contentious in India. At one end of the spectrum are those who dismiss teacher management as a neo-liberal obsession and at the other end are those who reduce all teacher related concerns to tenurial security and soft management.

One impact of this vacillation is that the most valuable recommendations related to teachers made in 1968 and 1986 policies remain unimplemented. Secondly, many practices have crept in that had no policy sanction – the appointment of contract teachers or para-teachers, centralised training regime using one template for all, ad hoc teacher recruitment and deployment practices, multiple salary scales among teachers, restrictions on mobility of some teachers (women, SC or ST) to posts of headmasters or educational administrators etc. Similarly, since 2003, the mushrooming of poor quality teacher education institutions has remained hidden from the glare of the public even though the National Council for Teacher Education (NCTE) was mandated to regulate the quality of such education.

What does the new draft policy say about teachers?

At the outset, I wholeheartedly welcome the draft NEP's opening statement that talks about teachers and the sorry state of their preparation, recruitment, deployment, service conditions, and teacher agency or empowerment. This is also extended to the unequivocal statement regarding removal of the unequal system of contract teachers or para-teachers at all levels – from primary right up to colleges and universities. The document also recognises the need to unburden teachers from non-educational duties, facilitate and develop vibrant professional communities, and give them more autonomy in the classroom. The draft NEP acknowledges the dire state of our teacher education institutions and the presence of poor qual-

ity institutions that have burgeoned over the years.

I am pleased that this draft policy reiterates many of the valuable recommendations of earlier policies, the Justice Verma Commission report, and recent committee reports on teacher education. The last decade has also seen a number of state-level initiatives to enhance the professional capabilities of teachers and also foster learning communities. While some of the suggestions of earlier policies, committees and commission reports find mention in this draft policy, it remains silent on the failure of the system in implementing those recommendations. Policies were rarely followed by a time-bound implementation plan or a concrete road map to transform the position of teachers.

Let us take the example of teacher shortages especially women teachers in science, mathematics, and economics or commerce in many states (especially in central and northern parts of India). Since the time of the Kothari Commission Report of 1965, successive policies and committee reports have recommended a time-bound and intensive programme to enhance the pool of teachers in science and mathematics, especially among women, tribal communities and in resource-poor areas. This was not implemented because planning was done in silos – there was a lack of foresight regarding identifying and nurturing of girls and tribal students at the school level and facilitating a long-term education or career planning to enhance the pool of women or tribal teachers who are qualified to teach beyond primary.

Similarly, recommendations regarding conditions that encourage teachers to work in rural or remote areas, especially those related to providing accommodation, safe public transport or rural allowances were not implemented – even though they were repeated in every policy (1968, 1986) and every Commission report.

The draft NEP 2019 underscores the transformation of the education system, stating that it

‘...will not be possible without passionate and committed school teachers and faculty in higher education institutions who will take charge of transforming the education system as envisioned in this policy... The contribution of teachers in all aspects of improving the education system... will be recognised...’

The following teacher related concerns have been highlighted in the draft policy:

1. No more para teachers and contract teachers. Tenure track for hiring teachers across all levels of education – starting with three-year probation followed by performance-based confirmation. Ensure parity in service conditions across all levels of education.
2. Redesign teacher education for foundational literacy and numeracy. Move teacher education to ‘multidisciplinary colleges and universities’.
3. Teacher deployment to ensure 30:1 Pupil-Teacher Ratio (PTR) in every school and not just the cluster or block, and assess needs to deploy subject teachers in the middle stage and above.
4. Merit-based promotion and salary structure through ‘multiple levels in each teacher rank’.
5. Encourage professional subject groups of teachers for peer learning and support.
6. Launch four-year Bachelor of Education, make scholarships available for outstanding students and introduce subject specialisation alongside theory and pedagogy.
7. Merit-based recruitment, examination plus interview, an appointment to a school complex.
8. Provision of local housing in rural and remote areas.
9. Halt ‘excessive teacher transfer’; new teachers appointed to school complexes and long tenure to foster better ‘teacher-student-community relationships’.
10. Improve service conditions through ‘adequate and safe infrastructure, including working toilets, clean drinking water, clean and attractive spaces conducive to learning, electricity, computing devices, and internet...’.
11. Teachers ‘will not be allowed any longer to conduct government work that is not directly related to teaching’.
12. Teachers will be ‘given more autonomy in choosing finer aspects of curriculum and pedagogy’.
13. Introduce a modular approach to teacher professional development to enhance teacher capacity. Rejuvenate academic support institutions like State Council for Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Block Institute of Teacher Education (BITE), District Institute of Education and Training (DIET), Cluster Resource Centres (CRCs), Career and Technical Education (CTE), Institute of Advanced Studies in Education (IASE) etc.
14. Employ qualified volunteer teachers through National Tutors Programme for remedial instruction.

Bridging promises and implementation

No doubt, the recommendations are promising. I shall begin by elucidating the sixth recommendation. Many studies show that (given the pool from which teachers are drawn) mastery over basic concepts, facility with the language of instruction, and overall academic competence need serious attention. In this context, ensuring that subject mastery is made an integral part of the four-year bachelor’s degree is desirable. This emphasis needs to continue even at the master’s level so that teachers who are being trained for secondary and higher secondary levels are able to hone their subject knowledge.

Empowering and strengthening school complexes as the unit for ongoing teacher education and teacher professional support need to be ensured. For this to become a reality, *sweeping administrative reform* is called for. This idea has been resisted for many decades now and the government would not be able to manage the transition to decentralised educational planning and administration without a strong political will.

Integrating teacher education institutions into higher education centres (universities and colleges) is a positive step. However, given that majority of government and private teacher education institutions either stand alone or are linked to other similar institutions, a lot of careful (state-specific) planning will be necessary to decide on accreditation, affiliation or integration. This should not be done in a hurry and NCTE alone should not be given the mandate to restructure the teacher education system.

Reforming teacher recruitment is urgently required and the draft NEP’s recommendations are directed towards a recruitment process that disqualifies teachers not interested in rural appointments. Most states in India do not have a clearly laid out policy to select the right teachers for the right schools. While the Teacher Eligibility Test (TET), national and state, have introduced acad-

emic standards, final confirmation through block-level interviews is being suggested. In addition, the draft policy suggests the appointment of teachers to specific schools or school complexes, so that the time-tested transfer or posting lobby is neutralised (a suggestion incidentally made as far back as 2005 through a draft of the Right to Education Bill). If teachers are not interested in working in rural areas, they could be eliminated at the interview stage. However, we are aware of the tendency of interview-based appointments to warp the system and reinforce backdoor policies. One possible way would be to conduct a counselling to disqualify interviewees who may not be interested in working in rural areas and/or difficult areas.

For teachers to perform effectively, they must know that there are systems and processes in place to protect their professional interests and aspirations. The government – state as well as central – could initiate a nationwide dialogue on appropriate *grievance redressal mechanisms* by drawing on good practices from the states, and encouraging others to adopt them.

nistrators cannot design or contract for necessary training programmes. An appraisal system would also enable promotions to be a reward for good performance rather than being simply based on time served.

This draft policy is promising, provided it is followed up with a rigorous state-wise implementation plan. Otherwise, the fate of the 2019 policy may not be any different from that of the 1968 and 1986 national education policies. **T**

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REFERENCES

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